

## Let's get physical - County earns top spot in state in health rankings

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Williamson County scored first among the state's 95 counties in six of eight categories in the national "County Health Rankings," released Wednesday by the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The study represents the first set of reports to rank the overall health of every county in all 50 states and Williamson County appears to be among the healthiest.

Each county is ranked within the state on how healthy people are and how long they live. They also are ranked on key factors that affect health such as: smoking, obesity, binge drinking, access to primary care providers, rates of high school graduation, rates of violent crime, air pollution levels, liquor store density, unemployment rates and number of children living in poverty.

Other studies have ranked states on health factors, but this is the first time researchers have examined the multiple factors that affect health in each county in all 50 states.

In Tennessee, Williamson County was ranked No. 1 in health outcomes, mortality, morbidity, health factors, health behaviors and social/economic factors.

"I think Williamson County is a great place to live," said Becky Brumley, Williamson County Health Department director. "We do well in assessments like this because I think we have a lot of success healthwise in collaboration of a lot of agencies."

Brumley pointed to the Williamson Medical Center and its physician community, as well as the Williamson County and Franklin Special Schools, and the general population, which seems to support exercise and use of county and city parks, as well as recreation and exercise facilities.

Researchers used five measures to assess the level of overall health or "health outcomes" by county: the rate of people dying before age 75; the percentage of people who reported being in fair or poor health; the number of days people reported being in poor physical health; number of days in poor mental health; and



Williamson County residents exemplify why this county leads the state in healthy living as they walk on treadmills at the county's Franklin Recreation Center Wednesday.

the rate of low-birth weight infants. Researchers then looked at factors that affect people's health within four categories: health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environment.

The study provided a target as well as a Tennessee value and Brumley said even in categories where Williamson didn't finish No. 1 — fifth in clinical care and 73rd in physical environment — the reasoning shows methods for improvement.

"If you look at us and then at the target and then at the Tennessee value, we still look really good," Brumley said of the clinical care category. One sub-category relates to diabetic screening of Medicare enrollees, and Brumley said both Williamson Medical Center and the Health Department have taken steps to increase diabetes screening and education programs for those living with diabetes.

Surprisingly, the percentage of uninsured adults under 65 living in the county was 14 percent, where the target is 12 percent and the Tennessee value is 15 percent.

"Williamson Medical Center is a not-for-profit governmental hospital and we do serve the indigent and the uninsured," said County Mayor Rogers Anderson, who sits on the medical center's board of trustees.

"We know Williamson County residents instill a higher value on quality of life, a fact illustrated by Williamson County's position in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation rankings," said Dennis Miller, Williamson Medical Center CEO. "The rankings show that people who live in healthier counties tend to have access to more health care providers and that is certainly the case in Williamson County as our Medical Center has grown and other health care providers have moved in.

"The number of physicians practicing on our staff has doubled in recent years, reflected by the higher number of primary care providers noted in the rankings. In addition, Williamson Medical Center takes pride in our role as a community hospital, providing education and free screenings throughout the community, which in turn raises awareness of healthy lifestyles," Miller said. "We are proud to serve a community where health is a top priority."

In regard to health behaviors, Williamson County was below the target and Tennessee value in all categories — adult smoking, adult obesity, motor vehicle crash death rate, chlamydia and teen birth rate — but at 13 percent of the adults saying they had engaged in binge drinking within the last 30 days, the county was well above the target — 3 percent — and the Tennessee value at 9 percent.

Though no connection is drawn in the report by the two statistics, Williamson County's liquor store density per 1,000 residents is 1.4 compared to the Tennessee value of 0.8.

Williamson County did not fare well in the physical environment category, finishing 73rd out of 95 counties, but Anderson said depending on when the data was collected for the report, strides have been made and Williamson County is currently an attainment county.

He points to the successful Clean Air Partnership created by local government in conjunction with The TMA Group, which also operates a vanpool network.

The rankings show that people who live in healthier counties tend to have higher education levels, are more likely to be employed, have access to more health care providers, and have more access to healthier foods, parks and recreational facilities.

For complete results, go to [www.countyhealthresults.org/tennessee/williamson](http://www.countyhealthresults.org/tennessee/williamson).